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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 002001

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/22/2016

TAGS: PREL PGOV KWBG IS SETTLEMENTS ISRAELI PALESTINIAN AFFAIRS

SUBJECT: GOI APPROVES EXPANSION OF SETTLEMENTS IN WEST BANK

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Gene A. Cretz for reasons 1.4 (b) and

This cable has been cleared by Consulate General Jerusalem.

1. (U) Israeli press reported May 21, that new Defense Minister Amir Peretz recently approved plans to expand four settlements in the West Bank. According to the reports, the decision and legal steps to expand the settlements began under former Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz, and the approvals took place within the last few weeks. The four settlements are:

-- Beitar Illit, southwest of Jerusalem in the Gush Etzion bloc; will be expanded by 400-500 dunams (100-125 acres).

-- Givat Ze'ev, north of Jerusalem; will be expanded by 60 dunams (15 acres).

-- Oranit, south of Qalqilya; no reports on the size of the expansion.

-- Maskiyyot, northern Jordan Valley; no reports on the size of the expansion.

2. (C) Pini Medan, former foreign policy advisor to Prime Minister Ehud Barak and currently an unofficial advisor to Peretz, told Pol and Econ Counselors on May 22 that he did not know how the decision to expand the settlements was made originally, but added that the GOI probably does not currently consider it to be a controversial move. He said that he believes that it is in line with Labor Party thinking and general Israeli sentiment that these settlements are in large blocs that will not be "negotiated away." He noted that Oranit, for instance, straddles the Green Line, and that no Israeli leader would divide such a settlement or would prevent such a settlement from expanding. Instead, he predicted, such territory would be made part of a land swap that he said would inevitably be part of any final status agreement.

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CRETZ